

First records for Niger of Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*, Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*, Buff-bellied Warbler *Phyllolais pulchella* and Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Kim Diget Christensen^a, Anders P. Tøttrup^b, Marcel C. Rahner^c and Joost Brouwer^d

Premières mentions pour le Niger du Coucou solitaire *Cuculus solitarius*, du Pipit africain *Anthus cinnamomeus*, du Phyllolaïs à ventre fauve *Phyllolais pulchella* et de la Pie-grièche isabelle *Lanius isabellinus*. Les observations de quatre espèces nouvelles pour le Niger sont documentées. Le chant d'un Coucou solitaire *Cuculus solitarius* a été clairement entendu en savane boisée, à environ 43 km à l'ouest de Diffa (13°12'N 12°08'E), le 25 septembre 2003. Le même jour, à environ 4 km vers l'est (13°12'N 12°11'E), deux Phyllolaïs à ventre fauve *Phyllolais pulchella* ont été observés. Un Pipit africain *Anthus cinnamomeus* a été découvert à environ 44 km au nord-est de Tahoua (15°04'N 05°38'E), le 25 juillet 2003. Une Pie-grièche isabelle *Lanius isabellinus* a été notée le long de la route Niamey–Tillabéri (13°47'N 01°39'E) en janvier 1994; le 19 septembre 2003, deux mâles ont été observés à environ 10 km au sud de Tanout (14°54'N 08°51'E).

The avifauna of Niger is still relatively little known. Since Giraudoux *et al.*'s (1988) summary, few studies on the occurrence and distribution of birds in Niger have been published. Here, Giraudoux *et al.* (1988) was used as the main reference for records prior to 1986; for post-1986 records, Newby *et al.* (1987), Sharland (1989), Holyoak & Seddon (1991), Sauvage (1993), Debout *et al.* (2000), Ambagis *et al.* (2003) and Crisler *et al.* (2003) were consulted. Most previous ornithological observations were made in the south-west, around the capital Niamey and in 'W' National Park. A more systematic study of Niger's avifauna, especially in the east and north of the country, is therefore likely to produce new findings.

In 2003 KDC, APT and MCR made observations of birds in Niger as a part of the Projet Régional de Lutte Intégrée contre les Sauteriaux au Sahel (PRÉLISS), funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Field work was undertaken in three areas: around Tahoua in the west-centre of the country, between Magaria and Tanout in the central-south (near Zinder), and around Diffa in the east. Three new species for Niger were discovered: Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*, Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* and Buff-bellied Warbler *Phyllolais pulchella*. Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* was

also sighted, and details of this record are also presented, along with a previously unpublished record by JB in 1994. These records are documented below.

Red-chested Cuckoo

On 25 September 2003, at 06.30 hrs, a Red-chested Cuckoo was heard by MCR in wooded savanna, c.43 km west of Diffa and c.10 km from the Komadougou-Yobé River (13°12'N 12°08'E; zone 4 in Giraudoux *et al.* 1988). Dense gallery forest occurs in places along this river and further south dense woodland is widespread. The call was a loud, far-carrying *WHIT whit weeu*, endlessly repeated with short intervals. The observer is familiar with this distinctive call from many other parts of Africa, as well as with vocalisations of all the other cuckoos of the region. No other cuckoo that might be found in West African savannas has a similar call; that of Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamorosus* is also three-syllabled but quite different (Fry *et al.* 1988, Borrow & Demey 2001).

Red-chested Cuckoo is a resident and intra-African migrant, visiting wooded savannas in the north of its range in March–December (Fry *et al.* 1988, Borrow & Demey 2001). The nearest published record is from Potiskum in the northern Sudan zone of north-east Nigeria (11°45'N 11°02'E) c.200 km south-west of Diffa (Elgood *et al.* 1994). In Togo, the northernmost observations